

June 29, 2006

Chairman Kevin J. Martin
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

I am writing today on behalf of SouthernLINC Wireless to applaud the Commission for issuing a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking so quickly in response to the Report of the Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks. The Panel's report is the outcome of the Commission's establishment of the Independent Panel in January 2006 to investigate the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the nation's communications network and to make recommendations as to how the impact of future natural disasters on the nation's communications network could be minimized. As you are probably aware, I was pleased to serve as a member of the Independent Panel and share the experiences of SouthernLINC Wireless, which was directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

SouthernLINC Wireless, a subsidiary of Southern Company, operates an 800 MHz digital radio system on FCC licensed frequencies using Motorola's iDEN technology. Designed to meet the operational requirements of Southern Company's electric utility subsidiaries, SouthernLINC Wireless provides dispatch radio, interconnect, text messaging and other services throughout a rural and urban service territory that includes most of the states of Alabama and Georgia, the panhandle of Florida and southeast Mississippi. Its service territory also includes the Gulf Coasts of Alabama, Mississippi and the Florida panhandle as well as the Atlantic Coast of Georgia. To provide the level of service required by its electric utility sisters, SouthernLINC Wireless's network was designed and built to withstand the varied weather conditions of the Southeast, everything from ice storms to hurricanes. For this reason, SouthernLINC Wireless's network already reflected many of the suggestions of the Independent Panel, thus supporting the FCC's efforts to ensure that communications facilities are in place and are functional to support disaster recovery.

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Since commercial operation began in 1996, SouthernLINC Wireless has focused on serving rural areas, providing wireless services to small towns like Opp, Alabama; Claxton, Georgia; Frink, Florida, and Nacaise, Mississippi. Its network serves rural areas located far from the major interstates and highways where most of the other carriers choose to focus. Many hospitals, public safety entities and emergency management agencies in these rural areas have chosen SouthernLINC Wireless as their carrier due to the coverage and rugged design of SouthernLINC Wireless's network, not to mention its attractive service offerings. By actively seeking and serving customers in rural areas, SouthernLINC Wireless is furthering the Commission's goals of bringing wireless service to rural areas and ensuring that these areas remain connected during national emergencies and natural disasters.

SouthernLINC Wireless serves a crucial role during disasters, and the company has made providing reliable communications during a disaster a high priority. Fifteen named hurricanes have made landfall in its service territory since SouthernLINC Wireless began operations. The most recent, Hurricane Katrina, caused extensive damage along the Mississippi and Alabama Gulf Coasts and inland for many miles. In many instances, the SouthernLINC Wireless network provided the only immediate means of communicating along the coastal areas of Mississippi and Alabama. SouthernLINC Wireless also took extraordinary steps to repair damaged facilities immediately and ensure that vital communications were possible, including, among other things, deploying microwave facilities and cell sites on wheels to replace damaged facilities. In fact, 98% of SouthernLINC Wireless's cell sites were online and providing communications on September 1, 2006 and 100% were online and providing communications on September 6, 2006. SouthernLINC Wireless also activated approximately 2,500 phones for use by government agencies and public service entities, including the Mississippi EMA, the National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Singing River Hospital. Similarly, when calls placed to the 228 area code in Mississippi could not be completed due to heavy call volume, SouthernLINC Wireless quickly provisioned public safety personnel with toll free numbers for their SouthernLINC Wireless phones in order to bypass the overloaded equipment. In so doing, SouthernLINC Wireless enabled public safety personnel, many of whom that were not SouthernLINC Wireless customers prior to the storm, to communicate with other public safety personnel.

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In order to continue providing high quality wireless services to underserved rural areas and ensuring that communications will be available throughout the recovery period after disasters, SouthernLINC Wireless must continue to make significant investments in its network. Prompt grant of the Eligible Telecommunications Carrier applications for the states of Alabama, Florida and Georgia that SouthernLINC Wireless filed with the Commission on September 14, 2004 would further the Commission's goals by facilitating the necessary investments. In those applications, SouthernLINC Wireless demonstrated not only its qualifications to be an ETC, but also its commitment to providing service in rural areas and in areas impacted by disasters. Therefore, SouthernLINC Wireless respectfully requests that the Commission expedite approval of its ETC applications, which, as of the date of this letter, have been pending for over 21 months.

SouthernLINC Wireless looks forward to continued work with the Commission to further the agency's goals, and stands ready to help in any way necessary to expedite approval of SouthernLINC Wireless's ETC applications.

Sincerely,



cc. Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Mr. Thomas J. Navin Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau